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**Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton,
on behalf of the European Union, on the International Day for
the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2012**

Violence and abuse affect women from all kinds of backgrounds every day. As many as seven in ten women around the world report having experienced physical violence at some point in their lifetime. The violence knows no geographical, cultural, social, economic or educational boundaries. It is a phenomenon that affects all societies and takes many gruesome forms: from sexual harassment to female genital mutilation, forced marriage to honour killings. Violence against women is arguably the most widespread human rights violation of our time. A violation that claims millions of victims every year and causes terrible physical and emotional pain.

We must not only help prevent violence; we must also work to provide women with access to economic opportunities, to ensure their equal participation in public life, repeal laws and practices that continue to discriminate against them and ensure that homes, offices, streets and schools are safe for women and girls.

The EU is committed to leading this work. We have made protection against gender-based violence a key feature of the EU's human rights strategy. And we have cleared the way for greater cooperation between the EU and the UN on this agenda. Women and girls are particularly targeted and vulnerable in conflict situations. We have therefore made it a priority for the EU's military and police missions to prevent and combat gender-based violence. The EU's mission in Kosovo is, for example, already involved in the investigation and prosecution of war rape cases and in strengthening the fight against human trafficking. And the EU is spending € 4 million to reduce violence against women in Egypt.

P R E S S

The elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls is the priority theme of the UN Commission on the Status of Women's 57th session, which will be held in March 2013. The EU will work to ensure the Commission's success.
